



Montana Main Street A Case Study Promotion

Lighten Up Butte, Montana

Visitors approaching Butte at night have long noted the quality of the lights seen from a distance. At a mile above sea level, streetlights sparkle in the high altitude air and provide an exciting spectacle to those flying into the narrow Summit Valley or driving down the mountain from Homestake Pass of the Continental Divide. Paul Harvey once referred to the view as like seeing diamonds sparkling on black velvet cloth before the approaching traveler. Now, a few rubies have been added to the mix thanks to a recent community project.

There is no more important symbol of Butte than its gallows frames that tower over the Hill's old underground copper mineyards. These structures --from 99 feet to nearly 200 feet tall--are remnants of the underground copper mining era that was the engine for the city's renowned prosperity and the source of its nickname--The Richest Hill on Earth. Often mistaken for oil derricks by visitors, these gallows frames were originally used to lower miners to their work areas below the surface. The double meaning of the name was not lost on the workers who knew well the serious risks in their daily work. Many died below the surface in the dangerous business of getting the rock in the box. Today, about a dozen

of these headframes have been preserved, immediately visible from anywhere in the valley below and recognized far and wide as symbols of the substance and spirit of Butte, Montana. Literally, they represent Butte's mining heritage, the submerged sacrifice of sweat, toil and tears to get the precious metals from beneath the surface that helped win wars and fuel a global economy. The copper mines beneath each headframe made widows and orphans but their immense wealth also fed and clothed thousands of families, many of them immigrants from around the world who realized their American dreams in this remote boom camp. Today, they remain potent symbols of the resilience of a city that stands strong and straight against the onslaught of time and the elements. They punctuate the Butte landscape like exclamation points. Yet, for most of the hours of the day, especially in long winter nights, they have remained invisible to millions of people who pass by Butte on their way east or west, north and south.

A community project led by Mainstreet Uptown Butte is shining lights on these shrouded remnants of Butte's heritage. These Butte icons are being lit for the world to see and appreciate in a way that honors the rich mining heritage they represent. In 2003, the Travona mineyard headframe on Butte's lower west side, was lit with low-energy, high efficiency red LED light strings. Local benefactors Jon Sesso and Barb Korner donated the funds to purchase the lights (to be lit in honor of their parents) and took the all-important first steps to ensure the project was completed. Then, the second headframe, the Orphan Girl on the grounds of the World Museum of Mining was lit thanks to the contributions of local corporate sponsors. Next, the Anselmo, one of the Hill's tallest at 155 feet, was strung with lights. The Anselmo was sponsored by Joe and Rosemary Jordan. Four more headframes have followed since then as sponsors stepped forward to light the Original, one of the most prominent, and its nearby twin, the Steward, the Belmont and the Mountain Consolidated to join the growing nighttime dance of red lights on Butte's fabled Hill.

The project has overcome several obstacles as it has moved forward. Research uncovered the fact that there are little to no recorded measurements of the cross members and other features of the structures on file anywhere so they had to be measured to ensure an accurate order for lights. The project received a major donation from a Butte company, Pioneer Technical Services when they provided the time and expertise to measure all of the lighting candidates. The condition of electrical service to each headframe has also been an important consideration. Some have excellent electrical service, others have required an upgrade. A couple of the mineyards have no electrical service at all.

Efforts are also underway to defray the costs of future maintenance and electrical costs. For more information about visiting Butte to see the illuminated headframes, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to turn on the lights and keep them lit in years to come, contact Mainstreet Uptown Butte, P.O. Box 696, Butte, MT 59703; 406-497-6464 or visit their web site at www.mainstreetbutte.org.

For more information on the Montana Main Street Program, call 406-841-2756